

40 WEEKS EARL BLUMENAUER 40 IDEAS

#25 Saving Public Broadcasting

Background

170 million Americans not only listen to or watch public broadcasting each month; they depend on it. For those in rural areas, public broadcasting stations may be the only source of free and high-quality programming tailored to meet each community's local needs. Funds appropriated by Congress can account for up to half of a rural stations total budget, and in some cases more. This is a gap that cannot be closed by increased ad revenues or donor support.

The vast majority of federal funding goes directly to the more than 1,300 public television and radio stations across the country, supporting 24,000 local jobs. Every federal dollar invested in public broadcasting is leveraged by local stations to raise \$6 more on their own. In addition to specifically tailored, local coverage, public broadcasting dedicates around 30 percent of its coverage to international affairs, versus the 19 percent average of commercial networks.

In addition, public broadcasting has broad support from Republicans, Independents, and Democrats alike. That's why PBS and its member stations were named number one in public trust and a "excellent" use of taxpayer dollars for the 9th consecutive year. Nearly 8 in 10 voters – 79 percent – believe that public broadcasting should receive the same amount of government funding or more than it currently does.

Unfortunately, funding for public broadcasting remains a contentious issue. Congressman Blumenauer led efforts in the 112th Congress to [preserve public broadcasting against partisan attacks](#), fending off three bills aimed at defunding public broadcasting, and ultimately restored full funding for our public broadcasting system. Yet recent legislation is at it again and would slash funding now, defund NPR Federal support, and end public broadcasting as we know it within 2 years.

Solution

One good thing about last year's budget was a requirement to have a study about alternatives to funding public broadcasting so that people would have hard facts for this year's budget discussion. The results clearly show that there is no viable alternative to Federal support. Reduction or elimination of funding to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting would not only result in a net loss of revenue due to the loss of corporate underwriting and independent contributions but potentially put 63% of radio stations and 67% of television stations in the public broadcasting system at risk.

The only way to save public broadcasting once and for all is to have a frank conversation about its future – does America want 500 channels with nothing on, or an enriched source of high-quality, cultural, education and news programming?

Congressman Blumenauer will continue fighting to preserve public broadcasting. He is reaching out to his colleagues to create a bipartisan consensus on protecting this vital national resource, arguing that without continued federal support, public broadcasting would lose its unique character that so many enjoy and have come to depend on and trust, and that the public broadcasting format of in-depth coverage cannot survive without federal seed money. If it could, a similar, commercially funded station would already exist, given public broadcasting's large and growing audience.

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